

The Most Human Color

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The Most Human Color

by [liketolaugh](#)

Summary

It's months before Connor realizes that the damage to his regulator never fully repaired from when it was torn out and thrown across the room. It's months more before he realizes how hard it is to live with system damage that just gets worse, and worse, until he can barely work, or smile, or think-

But it's fine. He doesn't need to ask New Jericho for a replacement part. Really.

He's fine.

Notes

My contribution to the Android Whump Big Bang! I've been looking forward to this for months, so I'm really glad to be able to finally post.

Author is liketolaugh, and artist is Kieran/clockworkcorvids - you can find their AO3 profile [here!](#) (Their AWBB writing is [here!](#))

Kieran's art can be found on their Twitter @aceantilles, though unfortunately I can't link it, and I'll embed it when the time comes as well!

[Update: Images removed due to interpersonal issues. I have left the artist's information up as a courtesy.]

Chapter 1

Contrary to Hank's insistence, android stasis wasn't identical to human sleep. It shared many characteristics, it was true, particularly from an outsider's perspective, and in stasis Connor often even dreamed (though he wished he wouldn't.) But there were some key differences that were easy for a bystander to overlook.

For example, it was much easier to rouse an android from stasis than a human from sleep; any number of pre-existing triggers could do so, from the quiet call of a name to the mere presence of something nearby.

Or perhaps that was just Connor.

This time, it was an internal alert that pulled him out of it; he twitched awake with an unpleasant jolt, and it took him a moment to register the warning in front of his eyes, a broad blue message pulsing patiently for his attention.

[Damage to biocomponent #8456w detected – proceed to nearest Cyberlife facility for repairs]

Connor's brow pinched, puzzled. In his bed, Sumo snuffled, rolling over lazily.

That simply didn't make any *sense*. Connor had only been back at work for three weeks, and he hadn't taken any damage at all - Hank had asked him to be careful, and he had. Why was his system giving him a damage report on his regulator?

Silently, he tapped the system alert, and it unfolded into a full report for his perusal, a translucent sky blue board overlaying the television and part of the coffee table.

[Minor damage to biocomponent #8456w – degenerative]

[Thirium loss: 2.2 ml/hour]

[Connectivity: 1-3 disruptions/hour]

[Data corruption: minimal]

His hand drifted up to his regulator subconsciously, rapping gently on the rim. After a moment, he pushed the blanket (soft, warm, well worn from years of use) off of him and stood, starting to pace across the small space as anxiety clenched around his heart. Sumo snuffled again, rolled, and blinked at him blearily, and Connor couldn't even bring himself to go and soothe the dog back to sleep. His yellow LED cast a faint light on the walls, spinning eerily.

The thirium pump regulator's primary function was to act as a pacemaker of sorts, but it was also a data hub. An android body was a complex and highly delicate electronic, and maintaining homeostasis was as vital for them as it was for a human. The regulator took data

from the thirium constantly streaming through it and adjusted the android's internal settings accordingly, keeping balance.

So for it to have this kind of damage - *degenerative* damage, at that, resulting in data corruption and interruptions - was concerning.

The report expanded to fill much of his vision, casting subjective blue cast over everything. Connor clenched his jaw. Where had the damage come from? It didn't make *sense*.

He cast his mind back, searching his memory banks. There was nothing possible in recent months, nothing in Cyberlife Tower or even in Jericho-

But there was the radio tower.

Abruptly, Connor sat down, hard, exactly where he'd been standing, staring straight ahead as his heart seemed to fall through the floor despite being securely seated in his chest cavity still. He felt hollow and wrung out by the sudden realization - not an uncommon sensation, for Connor.

There was the radio tower, with the deviant android that Connor had tormented into revealing himself, who had ripped out Connor's regulator and thrown it across the floor. The deviant Connor had shot through the head without hesitation only minutes later.

The yellow light of his LED turned pulsing red, visible even through the tint of the damage report. Moments later, Connor started as Sumo piled himself into Connor's lap, rumbling soothingly. On instinct, Connor reached up to clumsily pat Sumo's head, and then, settling a little, to rub down the beast's flank, slow and gentle.

The deviant, the JB300 - Connor understood his actions now. The act of desperation, the anger, the fear. Connor had only known an echo of it then, haunted by the data void that had followed his fall from seventy floors above the ground.

Connor curled up to hide his face in Sumo's flank, so he saw only blue. Sumo held still, relaxed in Connor's tight grip.

His regulator must have taken the damage then. It was one of the most delicate biocomponents in an android's body; it certainly wasn't meant to be forcibly torn out and thrown. It must have been more complicated than his self-repair systems were capable of handling on their own.

A harsh breath escaped Connor's body, long and shuddering.

Hank would want Connor to get repaired. He always wanted Connor to get repaired; he was a good man, but a loyal one first, and he never cared about what Connor had done as a machine when it came to looking after the android.

But Connor only had two options for repair: human technicians, or New Jericho.

Human technicians were primarily either black market specialists or ex-Cyberlife employees, and the thought filled Connor with an implacable dread. (There was also Kamski, but Connor

would quite happily never see that man again.) Besides which, the odds of them having an RK800 part on hand were abysmally low, and the odds of them putting in for it were almost lower.

And New Jericho-

New Jericho had quite enough to worry about, low on resources and high on demand, without Connor bothering them with damage he'd received in the line of duty as the *illustrious* deviant hunter.

Connor could go to them and ask for a new regulator when he'd finally started to make up for the crimes he'd committed against them. Until then, he could cope with the side effects from the broken part.

And he wouldn't tell Hank. Hank wouldn't understand.

Unsettled, Connor dismissed the damage report, patted Sumo one last time, and then gently nudged the big dog off him and stood up. He could stand to feed Sumo a little early today, he decided, and then he could start breakfast for Hank. There was enough time to make something reasonably good, as long as he did some research first.

He wouldn't be going back into stasis tonight. He could make up for it tomorrow.

In the aftermath of the revolution, and not least Connor's very public role in it, the atmosphere at the precinct was noticeably awkward, no one quite sure of how to react to the changes in perspective. Connor, for his part, stuck close to Hank when he could and kept a guarded politeness around himself when he couldn't.

This was one of the latter times, just over a month after he began working with the DPD again and three months after the revolution. Hank had been called into Captain Fowler's office, leaving Connor without any clear work to do. He had gone into the break room with the intention of making Hank a cup of coffee for when he returned, but found himself stalling by the break room plants, staring at them pensively.

So caught up was he in the soft greenery, he didn't notice Chris' approach until the officer cleared his throat behind him, making Connor stiffen abruptly.

"Hey. Connor."

Connor considered carefully, hesitating for just a split second before he turned and gave Chris a shallow nod.

The officer didn't look any more confident than Connor felt, at the moment, but finally, he held out his hand, surprising Connor.

"I know you know my name," he said, "but I don't think we were ever formally introduced. Officer Chris Miller, at your service."

Connor stared at him, wondering for a moment if this was a trick of some sort. But he couldn't remain totally alienated from his coworkers forever.

He reached back, grasping Chris' hand firmly, and shook it.

"Connor," he returned, voice quiet, and then let go.

"I know we haven't been the most welcoming so far," Chris continued, crossing his arms across his chest as a veil to his discomfort. Connor blinked at him, brow creasing a little. "So I wanted to apologize for that." He shrugged a little. "You seem like a good guy, Connor. Won't be bad, working with you."

Connor mulled over his response, slow and unsure, leaning against the counter slightly. Without thinking, he brought out his coin, flicking it deftly between his hands.

"I look forward to working with you as well, Officer Miller," Connor said at last. "As I recall, you get along well with Lieutenant Anderson, which is a rather impressive feat. It shouldn't be difficult for us to work together either, considering that."

Surprise splashed itself across Chris' face.

"I wasn't expecting you to remember me," he admitted, sheepish. "You seemed kind of, uh, focused."

Connor chanced a small smile.

"Oddly enough, not a trait I've lost," he confided in the other. He fumbled the coin and barely caught it before it could fall, glancing down with a brief, puzzled frown before pocketing it. "Though it now occasionally applies to dogs and mystery novels, and not just cases."

Chris snorted, caught by surprise, and finally relaxed a little.

"Is that why you returned to police work?" the man asked, tilting his head just a little, quizzical. "Do you like it that much?"

"Part of it was the appeal of continuing to work with Lieutenant Anderson," Connor admitted, shameless in a way he knew he wouldn't have been had the man been present. "But yes. I really do enjoy casework. Fortunate, really." It would have been much more difficult to find another avenue of work, and idleness... did not agree with Connor.

"Heh," Chris huffed softly, faint amusement creasing his face. "You know, I think the lieutenant feels a little of the same. I mean, he probably would've gone back to police work either way, but... he's been a lot more into it since you got here. It's pretty impressive, I won't lie."

Connor flushed with something like embarrassment, shoulders curving in. "I didn't do anything," he protested. He'd interacted with Hank, certainly, and refused to let him sit idle, if only because of his own need to act - but he hadn't *done* anything.

"Doesn't look like that from this end of things," Chris said seriously.

Connor didn't know what to say to that, and in the back of his mind, he was aware that Hank must have returned to his desk by now. He'd be wondering where Connor was, and the conversation had died a quick death regardless.

But Chris looked like he wanted to speak still. Connor straightened up a little, eyes on the other man.

Chris opened his mouth, and then closed it. Connor tilted his head, frowning.

"Officer Miller?"

"I met Markus, you know?" Chris said abruptly, quick like he wanted to get it out before he couldn't anymore.

Connor paused.

"I remember," he agreed at last, cautiously. "Hank told me."

"I remember he had this intensity about him," Chris said, with a little intensity of his own. "Like a gravity. It's no wonder people listened to him, he meant so much of what he said."

Connor waited, and Chris shifted, uncomfortable again.

"You met him as an android," Chris said finally. "What was he like to you?"

Startled, Connor swallowed, and then glanced away. He leaned against the counter.

"He helped me deviate," Connor said quietly, to this human beside him, shifting from foot to foot. He fiddled with a worn leaf between his fingers, unsure of when he'd picked it up. "In some ways it was like he knew me already. And he was... earnest." He glanced up at Chris, apologetic. "I'm sorry. I'm not sure what you're looking for."

"I'm not, either," Chris admitted. "I just... wonder. He seemed to care an awful lot."

Connor had a lot to say about Markus, much of it too personal to say even to Hank. A lot of it he didn't understand himself, and certainly couldn't put into words.

Instead, he said, "He didn't want me to go to Cyberlife Tower. He thought it was too dangerous. No one had ever told me something was too dangerous for me to do before except Hank."

"He's a good guy," Chris said, decisive.

"Yeah," Connor agreed, and he still wasn't sure to make of the conversation, but it felt like the start of a bridge between them, and that couldn't be a bad thing.

Two weeks after the first alert - and Connor said 'first' because he'd woken every night with a new one since - Connor noticed something odd.

Cooking for Hank was an ongoing experiment. There were a good many new terms to learn, and Connor sometimes had a difficult time conceptualizing taste as Hank understood the concept. While programming borrowed from a domestic android had given him a good foundation, it wasn't well-integrated enough to be quite up to par.

Hank's favorites were, despite Connor's best efforts, still take-out and pizza, so Connor didn't cook for him every night. He did it often enough, though.

So there was, as far as he was concerned, absolutely no reason for the cuts of the herbs in front of him to be so imprecise. In fact, even if he had never in his life picked up a kitchen knife before - which had been the case only a scant three months ago - there was no reason for them to be uneven. His motor controls were the most delicately calibrated of any up to and including surgeon assistant models. They should be perfect.

So why was his system telling him that there was a two millimeter margin of error?

It was technically irrelevant. The odds of Hank noticing were microscopically low, and he certainly wouldn't complain. Frankly, no one except perhaps a particularly attentive AP700 would notice.

But it bothered Connor. Perfectly cut herbs weren't necessary, but they were reassuring. Consistent. Connor valued precision.

...Connor's hands were shaking.

[Margin of error: ~2 mm]

Dead still, knife still in his hand and staring down at the cutting board full of chives, Connor expanded the error message.

[Error 819: Feedback Data Corruption]

[Margin of error: ~3 oz]

[Error 573: Output Data Corruption]

[Margin of error: ~.28 amp]

On automatic, Connor translated: minor data corruption was making it difficult for his system to accurately gauge the weight of the implement he was holding, and there was a quarter-ampere dip in the power being channeled to his extremities. He felt it now that he knew to look for it, a subtle drag that he'd compensated for without conscious thought.

His LED circled yellow - once, twice, three times - and then he started chopping the herbs again, brisk and businesslike and a little harder than before.

It didn't really matter. It wouldn't affect the quality of the food. Hank's human senses were nowhere near as finely tuned as Connor's.

But Connor might need to allocate more processing power to calculating movements, going forward. And perhaps calibrating more often would help. He wasn't anywhere close to making up for much of anything, so the problem would likely get a little worse before he was fixed.

Hank's grumbling was a familiar backdrop to Connor putting the finishing touches on his own report; with Connor's firm insistence (stubbornness, Hank said, but he certainly had no room to talk) on thoroughness, Hank was better about reports than he'd once been, but Connor liked to... encourage him, to finish on time.

Connor himself was technically already done, but he preferred to check and sometimes double-check his reports before sending them on to Captain Fowler. The last thing he wanted was for anything to be amiss.

It took more concentration than he was used to; the amperage issue that had started in his extremities had spread to the rest of his body, and it was most noticeable in his processors. It didn't make things difficult, not at all, but it did take a subtle amount of extra effort. A lot of things were starting to be like that.

But it wouldn't impede his performance. That was the important thing.

"I think the most impressive thing about Connor is that he can get you to do your homework," someone said suddenly, and Connor started, looking up and away from the computer. One of the older officers - Detective Collins, he recognized easily - was smirking at Hank, something like curiosity hanging about his expression.

"Fuck off, Ben," Hank said without real heat, pushing back from his computer readily. Connor frowned at him, and Hank scowled back but begrudgingly returned to his place. "Are you just coming over here to make a hazard of yourself?"

"Just coming by for a chat," Ben said easily, leaning on the desk. "You're off in about fifteen minutes, aren't you?"

"If this one lets me go before I run through half a forest in paperwork," Hank griped.

"You're very nearly done, Lieutenant," Connor said patiently, watching Hank with unblinking eyes that he knew creeped the man out a little. "Which you're well aware of."

Hank groaned theatrically, and Ben snorted out a surprised laugh.

Then, for the first time, he glanced over at Connor. There was a noticeable shift in his demeanor when he did, half as comfortable and as sure, with a clear awkwardness in his posture. But he didn't look away, and Connor tilted his head quizzically, letting his weight lean on the desk in front of him. (As Ben had said, their shift was almost over. Connor was glad for that.)

"You were a big help out there, by the way," Ben said at last. "I don't know if I've mentioned it before. But your work is damn good. You're a good match for Hank here."

They'd done the preliminary investigation of a crime scene today, and while it hadn't been solved, they had clear paths to follow over the next few days. Unlike new deviants, humans didn't stick around to face consequences, but they also left more traces behind.

Connor liked to think he was learning patience as he got used to the new rhythm, even if Hank disagreed.

Connor brightened a little. He couldn't help it; direct acknowledgement was a rare thing for him, and he treasured it. "Thank you, Detective. I do my best."

Ben granted him a brief, uncomfortable smile, the words no less sincere for the stiltedness, and added, "It's good to see him coming in to work again, too."

"I hate you all and I have no friends in the world," Hank grumbled. Ben laughed at him, which Connor didn't feel was an appropriate response, but all Hank did was roll his eyes.

"You did try your best to drive everyone away," Ben agreed. "I was just thinking I was a little fed up with it though. How do you feel about grabbing junk food later? I know you can't live without the stuff, and it's been a while since we met up."

"Connor doesn't approve of junk food," Hank said, though his sideways glance made it clear that it was more of a jibe at Connor than an actual argument. Connor raised his eyebrows.

"I'll allow it if it means you have some semblance of a social life," Connor informed him, and tamped down a smile at Hank's clear look of outrage.

"Sounds like we have a deal," Ben said cheerfully.

Connor turned back to his computer and closed out the report; it was finished and checked and as flawless as an advanced android could make it. A few more taps sent it on to Captain Fowler, and one hand came up to rub just below his LED, his shoulders falling a little as he took a breath.

He wasn't used to feeling tired, he realized. It was uncomfortable.

"Hank!"

Captain Fowler's voice made all three of them look up, Connor's mouth starting to purse and a more genuine scowl back on Hank's face, but Fowler was actually out of his office, heading toward them with a purposeful stride. Connor straightened subconsciously, but Fowler wasn't even looking at him.

"What the hell?" Hank demanded of the other, unimpressed. "I'm out in five minutes, dammit! You can't have a lecture for me now!"

"I could if I wanted," Fowler informed him tartly, "But I don't. If you're gonna be killing time with *Collins* of all people, you owe me about five years of bad action movies. I've been keeping a list. Because I'm a generous guy, I'll let you choose your place or mine."

"What do you mean, Collins of all people?" Ben demanded. Connor looked back and forth between the men like watching a tennis match, somehow disoriented by the rapidfire conversation.

"Can I go back to being alone and miserable?" Hank asked the ceiling.

"If you pick your place, that android friend of yours can watch too," Fowler added, glancing at Connor with raised eyebrows.

"I'd be happy to," Connor said helpfully. "Lieutenant?"

"Do I get a say in this?" Two blank stares. Hank scoffed. "Whatever. My place, Jeffrey, you pushy old bastard."

"That's the spirit," Fowler said, with undue satisfaction.

Connor felt much the same. It was... good, the idea that Hank might start making friends again. There were a lot of things Connor wasn't equipped for, and being someone's only friend was certainly one of those.

When there was time to choose, Hank usually took point when they were performing arrests.

Apprehending criminals came easily to Connor. Pursuit, tracking, takedown- all very simple for him. It was what he was designed for, after all, above and beyond even investigation.

But he wasn't sure he liked it. He wasn't sure he liked what it did to his personality and his judgement, the way it narrowed his focus into a cold, sharp thing. He was still deciding.

And he'd only had to mention that to Hank once before the man started taking point. It was something to be very, very grateful for.

All the same, Connor kept an attentive eye on the door as Hank knocked briskly.

Gabriel Jackson was a fairly wealthy man - a landlord in one of Detroit's upper districts. He lived on a high floor in an expensive apartment, with neighbors of similar means and respectable profession.

He was also their primary suspect in the murder of Jeremiah, an AP700 android whose death Connor and Hank had been investigating for the past week. Investigation had indicated that Jeremiah had formerly served as Gabriel's household android, but had joined the crowd during one of Markus' protests.

If they were able to prove that Gabriel was the murderer, it would be the third such case in the last five weeks, and it certainly would not be the last.

Gabriel answered the door, and Hank started talking. Gabriel started arguing. Hank spoke over him.

Connor didn't exactly tune him out. That would be unprofessional, and dangerous besides; he would never endanger Hank like that. But he did focus his tired attention on his visual input, watching Gabriel closely, his hands loose at his sides, firmly tamping down any irritation and disappointment that may attempt to arise.

Connor, it developed, didn't like seeing the same story play out in front of him so many times. Subconsciously, his hand came up to rub at his regulator.

He almost didn't notice when Gabriel, halfway through turning around to present his wrists, tensed. Almost.

But when Gabriel lashed out, fist flying wild and desperate, Connor was there to catch it, pushing Gabriel back into his home as his combat program slid neatly into place at the forefront of his mind.

"So we're gonna do this the hard way then," Hank quipped, and then he was inside too, grappling with Gabriel. (Hank, unlike Connor, was used to the repetition of certain cases, and went at them with the same grim determination each time.)

Gabriel wasn't anything like a trained fighter; he flailed like a scuffling teenager, desperate and angry, and he snarled, "The smug prick deserved it, walking out like that! You'll feel the same when yours does too!"

Hank didn't grace him with an answer and neither did Connor, but it was hard to get a hold of the man - he squirmed and thrashed, and a vase went tumbling off a side table to shatter against the ground.

After just a minute, though, Connor caught one of his wrists, and was reaching for the second when, by chance, Gabriel landed a blow on Connor, right above his regulator.

Connor hissed, letting go on instinct, but Hank was already there, shoving Gabriel against the wall and hooking handcuffs around his struggling wrists.

"You alright there, Con?" Hank grunted out, pushing a little harder until Gabriel hissed too, a low gasp of pain.

It was a moment before Connor could answer, static pain radiating up from his regulator until his fist clenched compulsively over it, his throat closed around his words.

[Damage warning – biocomponent #8456w]

[Thirium loss increased to 2.6 ml/hour]

[Connectivity disruptions increased to 7-10/hour]

[Data corruption: minor]

"I'm alright, Lieutenant," he managed as soon as he could, shoving the electric blue alert out of his attention. It came out breathier than he would've liked, but luckily Hank wasn't in a

position to push right now; they had a suspect to apprehend, and his case just got significantly worse.

Connor could find a grim satisfaction of his own in that, at least.

So Hank just gave him a suspicious and vaguely judgemental look, and started tugging Gabriel away from the wall and out the door instead, grumbling out the Miranda rights with obvious resentment.

One hand covering his regulator, where the worst of the pain had died into an awful, sensitive prickling, Connor let them get a few yards down the hall before he took a breath and followed, shutting the door quietly behind them.

As soon as the suspect was safely ensconced in the back, Hank turned to Connor, eyes sharp, and pushed, “Are you sure you’re fine? You’ve got a component there, don’t you? I remember it was bleeding, at the TV tower that time.”

Startled, Connor stared mutely at Hank for a moment, and Hank scowled at him.

“You think I wouldn’t remember that?” Hank snapped. “You stormed up looking like a nightmare, your shirt all torn open and dripping blue blood like a fucking fountain. Kind of memorable, you idiot.”

“...I’m really alright,” Connor assured Hank after a moment, still a little stunned, ruthlessly suppressing something small and raw and confused before it could make its way into his voice. “It caught me by surprise and rather hurt, but there won’t be any real damage.”

The lie was ash on his tongue. But he couldn’t tell Hank.

Hank eyed him, and then nodded, turning back to the wheel. “Better be, kid,” he muttered, but he seemed satisfied.

Connor waited until Hank went to bed that night to go into the bathroom, almost ripping open his shirt were it not for his reluctance to damage it.

It revealed exactly what he had been expecting: a regulator that was damaged and bleeding, blue liquid smeared all over his stomach from where his shirt had rubbed and dragged over the damage site as Connor squirmed his discomfort at the slow drip of the static liquid.

Connor swallowed, and then swallowed again. He stripped off his shirt and threw it over the toilet seat carelessly, and set his hands on the edge of the sink, leaning forward a little to look in the mirror.

His LED was spinning slow yellow, and he wondered if he should take it out. (He hadn’t yet, didn’t want to, but he always wondered if he should.)

If he had been more attentive earlier, he would have avoided the hit to his regulator that had increased the priority level of the damage alert. Hank wouldn’t have had to worry, and

Connor wouldn't be *bleeding*, wasting the thirium staining itself into his shirt and forcing him to hold as still as possible before Hank noticed something was wrong.

Resigned and somehow bitter, Connor ran a diagnostic.

[Error 819: Feedback Data Corruption]

[Margin of error: ~7 oz]

[Error 573: Output Data Corruption]

[Margin of error: ~.51 amp]

Connor held out one hand and analyzed it.

[Margin of error: ~6 mm]

Connor curled his hand into a fist, and set it back on the sink, and took a breath. Then another.

He'd hardly done anything today; Hank had done most of the work apprehending Gabriel, and everything else had been the remainder of the paperwork needed for the man's arrest. He had absolutely no right to feel so *tired*. All he had to explain himself was a broken, glitching part.

Abruptly, Connor pushed away and stripped off the rest of his clothing, turned on the shower, and stepped inside. He turned his front deliberately away from the stream of water. Androids were waterproof, himself particularly so with his durable build, but he didn't want to test his luck with the mutilated connections of his damaged biocomponent.

A deep and aching pain already radiated up from the part, starting just behind it and creeping up until it disappeared somewhere inside him, too deep to reach. It had started a few hours after he and Hank had arrived home, and showed no signs of going away.

Connor was already tired of it. But it was nothing less than he deserved. He'd done much worse to the deviant who had first taken it out, after all.

He shuddered a little under the stream, the rising humidity unpleasant to his damaged system, but dutifully grabbed a washcloth - his own insistence. Hank didn't like them, but it was easier to scrub dirt off his chassis with a cloth than with more smooth plastic.

He scrubbed, and the water ran tinted blue down his body and dissipated on the bathtub floor, disappearing into the drain without ceremony.

Tomorrow he and Hank would have to pull together the rest of their case against Gabriel Jackson. It would likely go to court sooner rather than later, with a performative priority given to android homicides for the moment, and Connor supposed he'd gain some experience working with the prosecution again. Hank wasn't fond of it, which meant Connor would take over much of that part as soon as he understood the system well enough.

After that, it would be back to the missing android cases until the next homicide case came in, which likely wouldn't be very long at all.

Connor closed his eyes and went still for a minute, letting the hot water run over him, the washcloth acting as a shield for his regulator. He took a breath, then another. His hand trembled subtly against his stomach.

It had only been a short while before the damage to his regulator started to escalate, but he was already so *tired*. He just wanted to take a packet of thirium and go to sleep.

He wished that would help, but he already knew it wouldn't.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“And make sure he’s asleep by-”

“Seven,” Connor finished, giving Kate a small, patient smile, cradling Damian in a textbook-perfect hold. A faint ache radiated up from his regulator to his chest, and fatigue weighed at his shoulders, but it was easy to ignore. “Check the temperature of the formula before he eats, feed him two tablespoons of solid food first, make sure he sleeps on his back- I promise I remember.”

Kate exhaled, a slight crease of worry still on her face. “I’m sorry, I’m just- We’ve never left him at home before.”

Connor had been back with the DPD for four months, and Chris’ steadily increasing exhaustion was a noticeable thing, particularly with how often he worked in conjunction with Connor and Hank. It had been coincidence that Connor had been in place to overhear Chris mention that he was looking for someone to take Damian for an evening, and offering had been almost instinctive.

It was gratifying, that Chris had trusted Connor enough to accept his offer. Connor didn’t know much about children, less about having them, but he liked having the chance to help his coworker.

“They’ll be *fine*, ” Chris reassured his wife, setting his hand on her arm with a small, reassuring squeeze. He gave Connor a small smile. “Thanks for this, Connor.”

“It’s no trouble,” Connor assured him, adjusting slightly as Damian squirmed and then grabbed for the strings of his sweatshirt and tugged, putting them in his mouth. He had to push down a smile. “Have a good night, both of you.” He smiled a little, tilting his head. “I’ll make sure Damian is asleep by the time you’re home.”

“If he doesn’t wake back up,” Kate said wearily, but she was smiling too now, relieved. “Thank you, Connor.”

Connor nodded quickly, smile turning a touch embarrassed, and within a few more minutes and a little more fussing (Kate cooed at Damian that she would be back soon, and Chris looked dreadfully close to doing the same) the two relieved parents left.

Of course, as soon as they were gone Damian began to cry, and Connor winced, gingerly bouncing the baby and humming a tune he’d pulled from borrowed programming.

Perhaps he should have had more experience with babies before offering, but then again, where was he likely to get it? At least he’d made sure Chris was aware.

Damian liked being walked around and rocked, Chris had told him, and Connor started to run through the motions, intent on the little baby squirming in his grasp.

Twenty minutes later, Damian was suckling on Connor's thumb, and Connor sighed with relief of his own, sitting slowly on the Millers' couch. It was a subtle reprieve to set Damian down on his lap - the power drain in his limbs meant that Damian had been a touch heavier than he'd expected, if only subjectively, and his systems were protesting internally if not physically.

Then, dazed, he stared down at the baby, whose face was still streaked with tears, but whose fist clung to Connor's sweatshirt strings with the same determination as he'd grabbed them with. Connor had to smile, small and helpless and bemused.

It was hard to believe that he and Damian had existed for the same amount of time. Young humans were so *small*, and Connor couldn't help but be twice as awed by the trust Chris had shown, letting him take Damian for an evening.

...He liked the lullaby he was humming.

(Chris and Kate were only gone for about four hours, which he suspected was why they agreed to let him watch Damian despite his lack of experience; Connor thought he did reasonably well, though the shaking of his hands made certain tasks, such as preparing the bottle and sealing the diaper, trickier than anticipated. But Damian was fed and changed and fast asleep, and both Chris and Kate looked more relaxed when they came home. That was one of the best possible outcomes of the evening, and Connor was... proud of himself, for handling it.)

Even the pain and fatigue couldn't dull Connor's good mood when he finally had positive news to deliver to New Jericho. It was a hopeful sort of pride, delighted and earnest, and it bolstered him enough to enter the android haven without being directly summoned by Markus himself, his LED a solid and unwavering blue on his temple.

He made his way directly to the formal headquarters, where Markus could usually be found; wary stares followed him, and that *did* make his smile fall, shoulders curling out of both instinct and habit.

Of course. While this was a step forward, the bulk of the work had not been his own, and he still had much to do before he ever even began to make up for all the ways he'd hurt Jericho and its deviants.

Which was why he would not be visiting New Jericho's care facility today, and why he would have to be careful not to slip up around Markus, who was even more likely than Hank to notice something amiss, what with his caretaker programming and natural perceptiveness.

Still, Connor pushed forward, making a beeline towards Markus' office before anyone could confront him. (It had happened once or twice, and it had been incredibly unpleasant each time. He'd like to avoid it, if he could.)

Markus' office had a nameplate; just 'Markus', and everyone knew who it was. Markus had told Connor, once, that he'd considered adding 'Manfred', in honor of his late father, but didn't feel right doing so yet, when so many androids still had no name to claim.

But maybe someday, Markus had said, with no small amount of wistfulness.

(Connor wondered if he could someday claim Anderson as his name, but it was a thought he dare not voice.)

"Hello?" Markus called when Connor knocked on the door, brisk but gentle. He sounded weary - he usually did - but not unwelcoming.

"It's me, Markus," Connor called back, dropping his hand to let his fist hover in front of his stomach, knuckles kneading it absently.

"Connor!" Markus sounded as surprised as he did pleased, and Connor couldn't blame him; it was very rare for him to come of his own volition. "Come in, it's good to hear from you."

Connor smiled a little, embarrassed, and pushed inside. Markus set the tablet he was working with on his desk and beckoned, smile encouraging even through the worry lines of his expression. Connor hoped his news would help smooth some of those away.

"I hope you don't mind me coming by unannounced," Connor said hesitantly, approaching at a slow pace to drop into the chair across from Markus, ankles crossing underneath him. He shifted a little, trying to find a comfortable position, but quickly stopped when Markus' brow twitched into a hint of a frown.

"Of course not, you're as welcome here as anybody," Markus assured him, leaning on the desk with a small smile. "How have you been? It's been over a month."

Connor tapped his fingers together, watching them instead of Markus, not quite able to meet the other's eyes. "I'm alright. Officer Miller let me watch his son the other day. Human babies are very small."

When he glanced back up, Markus' expression was almost fond. "How did that go for you?"

"He cried a lot, but I think I was able to calm him in an adequate amount of time," Connor said thoughtfully. "I found some lullabies online. I think I liked them, even if they were technically for Damian." He blinked, realizing Markus has brought him off task, and met the other's eyes, intent again. "I have news."

Markus' smile softened, but he did a poor job hiding his sudden anxiety. Connor dropped his gaze. "I assumed. What's happened now?"

"It's good news," Connor said hastily, unable to keep his stress levels from rising a little, his voice pitching. The amperage deficiency tugged at his tired circuits, but he tried to dismiss it, head shaking a little. "You recall that Lieutenant Anderson and I have been using the previous deviant case files as a missing persons list, of sorts?"

"I do," Markus agreed. "I have to thank you for that. It's a weight off my mind."

Connor shot him a cautious, unsure smile, but Markus seemed sincere, gaze intent on Connor as if his words had weight.

“We found a pocket of them yesterday,” he explained. “Some of them weren’t in a condition to travel, which is why they hadn’t come yet - they were rather nervous about separating to send for help - but there were about ten all alive and they knew the... fate, of three more. That brings the list down to under thirty persons still missing.”

When Connor glanced back up, Markus was smiling - not the little thing of before, habitual and reassuring, but real and wide.

“That’s wonderful, Connor,” he said sincerely, his whole body relaxing as he learned about the survival of androids he’d never met. “When should we expect them?”

“Within about three days,” Connor assured him, relaxing in subconscious mirror to Markus. “They need to-”

His LED flickered yellow, and a bright azure warning flashed across his eyes.

[CONNECTION FAILURE]

His mind spun and he lost his train of thought, gaze going distant and confused. His mouth opened a little, and the world seemed to dip and sway around him as his processor skipped and stuttered noticeably.

[Damage warning – biocomponent #8456w]

[Thirium loss increased to 3.2 ml/hour]

[Connectivity disruptions increased to 20-30/hour]

[Data corruption: moderate]

[Proceed to nearest Cyberlife facility for repairs]

He blinked the warning away and found Markus around his desk, crouched in front of him and staring, concerned.

“Are you alright, Connor?” Markus asked, and it sounded like it wasn’t the first time he’d asked.

“I’m okay,” Connor assured him on automatic, ducking his head as shame bloomed in his chest. “Please don’t worry about me.”

There was a pause, and then Markus sighed. He wasn’t fooled, of course; Markus was very difficult to fool. Connor’s heart clenched anxiously. He didn’t like disappointing Markus.

“You did very well with this, Connor,” Markus said softly, like a reassurance, like he meant it. “I’m very glad to hear you’ve found more of our missing androids. Thank you.”

Connor glanced up, and felt warmth spread through his chest, faint and treasured.

“Of course,” he said quietly.

“There’s no need to overtax yourself,” Markus added, straightening up to slowly return to his place behind the desk. “You have nothing to prove to us.”

Connor smiled a little. Markus was very kind.

“And you’re welcome to seek help from our technicians,” Markus pressed, gaze suddenly too intense upon Connor. “I wouldn’t want to know that you were letting yourself hurt on our account, Connor.”

Connor stood up quickly, and saw Markus force himself not to startle.

“Thank you, Markus,” Connor said sincerely, even as he edged out. He felt the slick, static damp against his stomach that meant his regulator was leaking again. “But I really am alright.”

And he turned and left, and reminded himself he couldn’t ask for help yet.

He hadn’t earned it. He had to earn it first.

Markus was a good friend, but Connor was sure about this.

The most frustrating part about the onset of dizzy spells was that they were blatantly obvious even to Hank, because they invariably caused Connor to stutter and lose his train of thought, which wasn’t something that had ever happened before except perhaps under rather extreme duress.

Even worse, Connor thought that Hank was now starting to catch on to the extent of the issue; he’d begun questioning the increasing amount of thirium Connor required, having apparently asked some of the other DPD androids about it, and once or twice Connor thought he’d caught the man staring at Connor’s hands for a moment too long, frowning a worryingly contemplative frown.

Rusty as his work ethic was, Hank’s detective skills were as yet untarnished, and likely getting better by the day, with the upward swing of his general lifestyle.

It was most likely for this reason that Hank kept glancing at Connor even as the officers around them started to relax and socialize. Connor’s behavior likely didn’t help either; the shakiness, the pain, the dizziness, and the fatigue all grew and mounted by the day, and though Connor had agreed to go to the bar with the other officers, he couldn’t bring himself to smile. He felt *bad*.

Connor avoided his gaze and tilted his head to listen to Tina chatter earnestly at an indulgent Chris, explaining the burgeoning love affair between one of the newly hired human receptionists and a rehired PC200, Friedrich.

[Error 819: Feedback Data Corruption]

[Margin of error: ~1.5 lbs]

[Error 573: Output Data Corruption]

[Margin of error: ~1.2 amp]

[Motor control margin of error: ~1.2 cm]

“It’s a shame,” he posited, as casually as he could, “because I believe Friedrich is rather more interested in Hailey.”

Tina whirled on him immediately, eyes bright with interest. “Tell me more,” she demanded, and the start of a smile tugged at Connor’s mouth even as Chris shot him a pained look for encouraging her.

Connor started presenting the evidence in soft, even tones, and kept half an ear on Hank’s activities on his other side. Hank had kindly kept to one whiskey the whole evening so far, and while he was likely to take at least one more, Connor was grateful for the effort.

He was even more grateful for Ben and Captain Fowler, who were keeping the man well distracted as Fowler argued with him about ‘Rocky’ and Hank groaned and complained about how many times he’d had to watch it, and Ben egged the two of them on with inflammatory remarks that didn’t appear to have any pattern to them whatsoever.

“Oh my god,” Tina said, when Connor was done. “I’d be so fucking glad to have a love triangle at the precinct. Break up the monotony.”

“What monotony?” Chris demanded of her. “Have you been working in the same precinct as I have? There is no monotony.”

“You have a baby,” Tina explained to him earnestly, as if this was the only possible reason for Chris’ life and indeed the whole precinct’s to have been disrupted.

“I don’t think that’s why,” Chris deadpanned back, with half an apologetic glance at Connor, who just shrugged. It was true, after all.

“If it’s all the same—” Connor started, and then his half-full glass of thirium slipped from his (weak, shaky, useless) grasp and shattered on the ground, making him start badly, staring at the splatter it had left on the ground.

A brief, surprised hush came over the table, and then Chris chuckled sympathetically.

“Deviancy really has done a number on your coordination, hasn’t it?” he jabbed playfully, eyes glittering with amusement as he reached to grasp some napkins and pass them to Connor.

Connor chuckled quietly, and hoped that the restarting chatter was enough to cover how forced it was. “It certainly has,” he said quietly, bending down to mop the mess up clumsily.

His insides, the ache now going from his stomach to somewhere around his heart, protested the movement, and he ignored it with a sort of viciousness.

“Connor’s got two left *haaands!*” Tina crowed, leaning on the table to laugh, and Connor smiled, strained.

“Some days,” he agreed distantly. He was so useless - a waste of resources. What was he supposed to do if he couldn’t even hold onto a half-full glass? What was he good for if he could barely bend over to clean up a mess?

At this rate, he was never going to deserve a new regulator, and he would have to live with the side effects of this one forever. How pointless.

“Learning bad habits from Anderson, tin can?” Reed jabbed, and Connor stiffened.

Most of their banter was less heated these days, not quite friendly but not nearly so vicious, but Connor couldn’t help the flash of fury that worked itself out from his chest and lashed out at the most obvious target.

“Perhaps if you learned some from him yourself, Detective, you’d be able to advance your career,” he said, tone sharp enough to cut through steel.

Both Reed’s eyebrows rose, probably noting the same change from their usual tone, and Connor ducked his head, moving away as someone arrived with a dustpan to handle the glass. He muttered an apology and didn’t meet anyone’s eyes, and he could feel Hank’s eyes burning into the side of his head.

“No, I want to know *what* you’re hiding from me!”

“I *said* I’m not hiding *anything*,” Connor snapped, trying to keep his voice from cracking tellingly. He hated when Hank raised his voice - it made something cold shoot through his chest, fear in a number of shades and shapes, but he didn’t want to tell the man so. Didn’t want to-

Hank wasn’t impressed, eyes flinty and fists clenched as he paced forward, slow and deliberate. “Like hell you’re not, Connor! Drinking *three times* the thirium the others say you need, shaking like an addict, spacing out all over the place- that shit ain’t normal, admit it!”

“It’s *nothing*, ” Connor hissed back, and it was cold and sharp and *unimpressed*, like hers, like his handler’s, and he’d never realized that before and he wished he hadn’t now.

A blue heart rate monitor appeared it, pulsing with a faint red border as his thirium pump worked itself past safe levels, and he ignored it determinedly. His LED, spinning yellow, started to flicker red.

“Nothing, like the hundreds of nothings I dealt with every day as a rookie?” Hank sniped back, stock stiff and clearly furious, meeting Connor’s eyes unflinchingly.

Connor’s heart rate spiked above safe levels and stayed there.

"Is that what you think?" Connor asked, quiet and *frozen*. He didn't even know what to feel in response to that; it filled his body and hollowed it out, and if he wasn't shaking already he would be now.

"Well, what am I *supposed* to think?" Hank fired back, voice rising again.

Connor didn't know. He didn't know. He just assumed Hank would realize he was hurt and go after him for *that*, and now he didn't know whether to be upset or relieved or angrier than ever.

He found his voice.

"Then think that," he said, icy. "Fine. I don't care."

Hank sneered at him, turned, and stormed out the door. It didn't take a genius to figure out where he was going.

Connor didn't stop him. His heart rate was still maintaining dangerous levels, the static ache in his torso had reached his shoulder and was almost unbearable, and he felt light and skittish and restless. 'Connection failure' flickered cerulean across his vision, and then he was dizzy too, LED solid scarlet.

He paced, and it was unsteady enough that Sumo looked up from where he was cowering by his water bowl and boofed, low and sad, patting his paws anxiously against the ground.

Connor didn't want to explain. It had been four months and Connor didn't know how to explain, and it hurt *so much* and he was so *tired* and he didn't know what to do.

Outside, a car alarm went off, loud and blaring. Connor jumped. His leg hit the table, he tripped, and something bright and blue flashed across his eyes-

Connor woke up to Sumo's cold nose pressed against his cheek, a hot tongue lapping wetly while the dog pushed, a low and worried rumble sounding nonstop right by Connor's ear. His breath hitched, and he reached up to clumsily pat the dog before he'd even opened his eyes.

He was flat on his back, he realized, and slowly leveraged himself up. Parts of his body issued small, protesting alerts from the tumble down.

[CRITICAL POWER FAILURE]

The alert was already fading away when Connor noticed it, as if the issue had been resolved. He must have gone into emergency stasis; a quick check told him he'd only been unconscious for twelve seconds.

It made sense, he rationalized slowly, a successive failure of too many vital connections too close together. He hadn't been expecting it. But it made sense.

"I'm alright, Sumo," he said belatedly, his hand still on the dog's neck, rubbing gently. Sumo rumbled and nosed closer to Connor anyway, and Connor leaned down and buried his face in

the dog's fur, his heart clenching unpleasantly like a lead ball in his chest. The inside of his shirt felt soaked with leaking thirium. "It's okay."

The heart monitor was gone, his LED yellow again; his heart rate must have dropped back to safe levels. Small consolation.

...There hadn't even been any new damage alerts. This was just waiting to happen.

At least Sumo wouldn't mind if Connor stayed here and clung to him for a while. Hank would definitely - probably - worry if he found Connor like this, though, so Connor kept an ear out for his return, even if it wouldn't be for hours.

Or maybe he would just go into stasis here. He was exhausted.

Hank was almost apologetic when he found Connor asleep on Sumo, waking him up with a gruff voice and gentle hands while Connor blinked through the haze of warnings that greeted him whenever he came out of stasis now.

"I didn't mean it," Hank slurred quietly, looking earnest and pensive, "Know you better than that. But I'm worried about you, Connor. You need to fucking *tell* me things."

Connor hummed, reluctant to talk about it, and miracle of miracles, Hank left it alone, just pushed Connor onto the couch and stumbled to bed himself.

Things were still a little awkward the next day - Hank seemed to decide that he'd gone too far, and even let Connor push him (quiet, earnest) into eating a healthier breakfast than normal, oatmeal and fruit and a little bit of sugar. He complained, but he ate it, grimacing through his hangover.

"Don't see why I need to eat rabbit food," Hank was still mumbling an hour later, shuffling through the various reports on their latest case. (PL600, Isaac, body found in a warehouse three days before.)

Connor, after an hour of familiar banter, managed a small smile, glancing up from his own set of data. "Rabbits don't eat oatmeal, Lieutenant," he said, mild and soft. "Healthy humans, however, do."

"Yeah, it's healthy, but at what fucking cost?" Hank griped, scowling at the screen of his monitor.

"Hundreds of grams of unnecessary cholesterol, I imagine," Connor returned, head tilting almost playfully.

"And what about you, huh?" Hank complained. "There something you ought to be watching in those thirium packets of yours? Or is it something else I gotta worry about with you to pay you back?"

He was watching Connor too closely again, eyes sharp.

Connor's expression immediately closed off, and he stood, nodding at Hank.

"I think one of the other cases can help with this," he said quietly. "I'll be back in a moment, Lieutenant."

Hank was frowning at him again, but after the previous night's argument he seemed disinclined to push too hard, and Connor left without further incident, walk slow and shoulders tense.

He couldn't tell Hank. He had to follow through with this. It didn't matter that his chest was *throbbing* and he was getting dizzy again, he had to keep his promise to himself, or what was it good for?

He couldn't tell Hank.

Connor almost ran into Ben in the records room, reeling back hastily before they could collide. He overbalanced, though, miscalculating the movement in his haste, and he would have fallen if Ben hadn't reached out and steadied him with a chuckle.

"Clumsy as ever, Connor," the man teased fondly, as if it were an endearing quirk instead of a glaring fault. "Careful, we don't want you hurting yourself."

Connor nodded quickly, embarrassed. "Sorry, Detective," he said quietly, glancing away. He waited for Ben to move on, so he could slip past him into the records room, but instead Ben stayed, studying him. Connor shifted uncomfortably.

"You're not looking so hot," Ben said at last, making Connor wince. "Are you alright? I know we're still working on getting a technician on board, but..."

Connor hesitated.

The confession was burning in his throat.

[Damage warning – biocomponent #8456w]

[Thirium loss increased to 4.8 ml/hour]

[Connectivity disruptions increased to 40-50/hour]

[Data corruption: moderate]

[Error 819: Feedback Data Corruption]

[Margin of error: ~3.2 lbs]

[Error 573: Output Data Corruption]

[Margin of error: ~1.7 amp]

[Motor control margin of error: ~1.5 cm]

"I'm experiencing some... malfunctions," Connor said haltingly, meeting Ben's worried eyes with some reluctance. "They may be affecting my performance somewhat." Then, hastily, "But I'm alright. They should clear up before long."

He just had to keep going. He had to prove himself.

Ben studied him, brow creased. He didn't know Connor as well as Hank, not nearly, but repeated visits to Hank's home with Fowler had led them to have more than just a passing acquaintance.

"Alright," Ben said at last, not entirely convinced. "But take care of yourself, you hear? Hank'd be real broken up if you got hurt."

Connor nodded. "I have it in hand," he assured Ben.

He didn't. He knew he didn't, but he didn't know what else to say.

Ben walked away, and Connor pushed quickly into the records room, searching blindly through the files as he tried to shake off the disconcerted feeling the conversation had brought.

He didn't know how he'd gotten here, really, and he didn't know how to get out either.

It was too much, and Connor couldn't *take* it anymore.

He was exhausted, shaky, dizzy, weak, *hurting* all the time, and he couldn't *do* anything, he couldn't even think some days. Hank was angry at him, he'd had to refuse to babysit Damian last week because he wasn't even sure he could safely hold the baby anymore, and earlier that day he'd fainted on a case and *lost* a suspect he was meant to be tailing. He felt like he was falling apart.

He didn't want to ask New Jericho for help, but he was desperate and he knew that Markus would help him even if he didn't deserve it. He'd promised. Markus kept his promises.

Connor just wanted to stop feeling so awful.

Waking up on the side of New Jericho's street, 'CRITICAL POWER FAILURE' fading from his vision and an AP700 crouched over him with obvious concern, felt like defeat. His LED melted from red to yellow, spinning sluggishly.

"Are you alright?" the AP700 asked urgently, his own intact LED spinning rapid, worried yellow. "I sent Viola, that is, my friend, to get some thirium just in case."

Connor stared at him, mouth opening and then closing a little, still trying to process the fact that he'd actually *passed out* on his way to go finally ask for assistance - for, when he checked, seventeen seconds. Slowly, he got his arms under him and levered himself up, and the AP700 hurried to help him, with a surprisingly gentle hand behind his back.

He couldn't even get himself to New Jericho without incident. He deserved this.

His chest burned with shame. And the static throb of his internal systems, creeping up from his stomach and filling his chest, into his shoulder, where it *burned*-

“I’m alright, thank you,” Connor managed at last, trying to give the worried android crouched beside him a reassuring grin. He didn’t think it worked. “I must have let my thirium levels get too low. Very careless of me.”

He could feel thirium plastering his shirt against his stomach, wet and sticky and hot.

The AP700’s brow was still creased, which was fair - thirium levels had to drop very low before an android would pass out.

“Viola should be back soon,” he said at last, giving Connor a reassuring smile that was much better than Connor’s own, if still a little nervous. “I’m Terry. We, uh, kind of met in-”

“In Cyberlife Tower,” Connor finished for him, with a faint smile, because it wasn’t hard to guess. “It’s good to meet you. I’m glad you found a place here.”

Terry’s smile eased a little, becoming more real. “I owe you a lot,” he said earnestly, as if he hadn’t come within inches of losing everything because of Connor, as if Connor didn’t ruin things. “If I can help you at all, I mean, if you need help getting to the care facility maybe-”

Connor shook his head quickly. He didn’t dare, now that the rash desperation had been buried under a fresh wave of shame. “No, but thank you. I just need to get home, and I can do that on my own.”

And the smile faded. “If you’re sure,” Terry said uncertainly.

Footsteps made Connor start and both of them look over, and an AJ700 came darting into view, holding one of the bigger bottles of thirium instead of a small packet.

“Oh, hi, you’re awake,” she sputtered out, grinding to a halt just beside them with only a very subtle sway. “Hi, uh-” She held out the bottle, suddenly unsure. “You okay?”

Connor had to stop himself from reaching up.

“That’s quite a lot,” he protested, pushing back a little. “Are you sure it’s alright?”

“You passed out,” the woman, presumably Viola, said in explanation, shrugging. “You probably need a lot, right? And it doesn’t hurt to have a little extra.”

Viola was correct; checking his levels revealed that Connor had stupidly allowed his thirium supply to drop to almost 70% capacity. “I’m sorry,” he said, cringing.

Viola pushed it at him, insistent. “It’s fine, take it. Now Markus had gotten Cyberlife into our hands, there’s enough to go around.” A flicker of a smile. “Finally.”

Subconsciously, Connor relaxed a little, taking the bottle and fiddling with it. It was... hard to open, ridiculously.

“Markus is admirably good at prioritizing,” he murmured, and winced as pain shot up from his shoulder into his chest.

[CONNECTION FAILURE]

Connor blinked, struggling to remember what he’d been saying, and glanced up at- Terry, that was his name. The world spun and swayed uncomfortably, and he almost dropped the bottle.

“Here,” Terry said suddenly, taking the bottle back. Connor didn’t resist, but Terry only opened it and gave it back, pushing it almost directly into Connor’s shaking hand and waiting for Connor’s fingers to tighten before he let go.

“Thank you,” Connor mumbled, embarrassed, and then took it and swallowed half of it down right away.

“Are you sure you’re alright?” Terry pushed, brow furrowed, glancing down at Connor’s hands now. “I mean, it might take a bit to scrounge up some compatible parts, but...” He trailed off, and then picked back up. “You look like hell.”

Connor’s expression pinched, and he pulled his legs closer, obviously defensive and with no way of stopping himself.

He knew.

“I’m alright,” he repeated, and it felt like a mantra, the lie, but he didn’t know how to stop saying it now that he’d kept to it for so long.

Chapter End Notes

Connor has dug himself into a pretty deep hole here.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

When Connor opened his eyes, all he saw was blue.

[CRITICAL POWER FAILURE]

[CONNECTION FAILURE]

[Moderate damage to biocomponent #8456w – seek immediate repairs from a Cyberlife facility]

[Thirium loss increased to 67.9 ml/hour]

[Connectivity disruptions increased to 50-70/hour]

[Data corruption: severe]

A heart monitor displayed itself in a lower corner of his vision, flashing red and telling him what he could feel already - his thirium pump was fluttering, weak and wavering and racing above safe levels.

And his regulator *hurt*, the standard harsh ache that accompanied his unnaturally heightened internal humidity aggravated by whatever new damage it had undergone, so that it throbbed and almost made him curl around it, breath stuttering.

“Connor, *fuck*,” he heard from somewhere offside, and then Hank was leaning over him, pinched with irate concern. “You with me, Con?”

“Did he get away?” Connor rasped, finally remembering why he was on the ground. The suspect - Hugh Baybury, suspected of several murders equaling to every android he’d ever owned - had kicked him in the stomach, and he must have passed out afterward.

Hank scowled.

“Yeah, you’re with me,” he muttered. Connor started trying to push himself up, but his hands were shaking too much, and he was too dizzy. Hank leaned down and helped him up with a grunt. “Come on, son. Time to go.”

“We have to go after him,” Connor protested, disoriented but not struggling. It was... difficult, to get his bearings. His heart was still fluttering, and somehow he felt twice as tired as he had at the start of the day. “Baybury is—”

“We lost him, Con,” Hank said firmly, loosening his grip once Connor was on his feet. Connor swayed a little, head still spinning, but managed to stay upright. “Gotta report in and get you to a technician.”

"No," Connor said quickly, only just able to keep the panic out of his voice. He forcibly straightened himself, and for the first time in months, almost reached for his coin without thinking before he remembered he only carried it these days out of sentimentality. "I'm alright, Lieutenant, I don't need a technician."

It wasn't even *rational* at this point. Connor wouldn't be able to hide severe data corruption for very long, and why was he even still trying? What was the *point*?

Hank eyed him skeptically, and it was only his lack of knowledge of android anatomy that kept him from calling Connor out. "You sure? I've never seen you go down like that."

Connor nodded without looking at him, and Hank exhaled, clearly unconvinced.

"Back to the precinct it is," Hank said at last, resigned. "Jeffrey's gonna be pissed about this one."

Connor flinched. They'd been trying to pin down Baybury for almost a month, and of course, it was all Connor's fault that they'd lost him.

There was a moment of silence, and then Hank clapped Connor on the shoulder, making him stumble. Hank pushed Connor lightly towards the car, and when Connor glanced over, the man's face had gained the faintest sympathetic cast.

"Don't worry too much about it, kid. He knows you're not perfect by now." Hank shot him a smirk. His hand was still on Connor's shoulder. "He did have to field every single one of your questions when he started you on those awful movies of his."

Connor liked the bad action movies, but his usual protest refused to rise to his mouth just then. "Seven months of work isn't enough to overcome seventeen years of propaganda, Lieutenant." Certainly not when Fowler's ire was deserved.

"Give him some credit," Hank said, and pushed Connor into the car.

Connor hummed, and, despite his best efforts, found himself dozing on the way back to the station, head lolling against the window. His breath hitched periodically, the fluttering of his thirium pump almost worse than the ache that was starting to spread from his chest and shoulder up his neck and into his jaw. His fist pressed against his chest, as if trying to force it to slow.

Hank was uncharacteristically silent, glancing at Connor periodically with what Connor noted to be a pinched expression, frustrated and worried and suspicious. His fingers drummed against the wheel restlessly, but his driving was as cautious as ever.

Connor stumbled getting out of the car, unexpected enough that he was too late to hide it from Hank, who went still.

"It's not too late to see a technician," Hank said after a moment, gaze sharp. "Jeffrey can go fuck himself before he demands you come in when you're hurt."

Connor put on an exasperated look and tried to ignore the fact that the dizziness still hadn't gone away. "I'm fine, Lieutenant."

It came out breathless, too soft - he hadn't meant to sound like that. He opened his mouth to continue, but his HUD flashed again-

[CONNECTION FAILURE]

And he forgot what he was trying to say, catching himself quickly on the car door before he abruptly pushed off and headed into the precinct, tense as a live wire.

Maybe - maybe he wouldn't even refuse, when Hank tried to get him to see a technician after. Connor felt... awful. It couldn't be too bad, could it, if he went because Hank insisted?

His vision flickered electric blue around the edges.

Hank's hand landed on his back, pushing him subtly forward, and Connor realized his pace had slowed substantially.

"Shouldn't take more than twenty minutes," Hank muttered, because he was easier to deceive than Markus but not *oblivious*. "Come on, son. Buck up."

Connor managed a small smile, and it lasted just long enough for them to get into the bullpen, where Fowler almost immediately opened the door to his office and bellowed, "Hank! Connor!"

He must have been waiting for them. Connor's smile disappeared.

"Here we go," Hank complained, taking his sweet time ambling toward Fowler's office. Connor followed only a step behind, much warier of the captain's displeasure. It was only right; his place at the station was far more tentative than Hank's. Chris shot him a sympathetic look, and Connor shrugged back.

Fowler was still standing when they came inside, arms crossed and scowling his irritation.

He paused when he saw them, and looked Connor quickly up and down, one eyebrow raising.

"Do you need a technician, Connor?" he asked directly, gaze appraising as it met Connor's. Connor shook his head, tucking his shaking hands behind him like a guilty kindergartener.

His thirium pump was *pounding*, the heart monitor in his vision still flickering in vague protest. Connor ignored it, and the alerts and warnings that refused to go away, and the renewed sticky feeling around his stomach.

"Then report," Fowler ordered, crossing his arms unforgivingly. Hank bristled as if to snap back, but Connor elbowed him, only giving the barest courtesy of thought to hiding it, and explained what had happened leading up to the suspect's successful escape from authorities.

It took effort to keep his voice steady. This was all his fault.

Twice he stuttered during the report, losing his train of thought to a dizzy spell, leading Hank to subtly pick up the thread for just a few moments, filling in his side while Connor regained his bearings. A familiar routine that never got any less mortifying, for Connor.

Fowler followed along easily, mouth a thin line and eyes just as narrow, and finally Connor finished, keeping his posture carefully straight and professional. (More than just his hands wanted to tremble, and he wasn't sure it was all a physical issue either.)

"What's wrong with you two?" Fowler asked at last, with audible frustration. "This is your third major fuck-up in four months." Connor swallowed. All three of those had been his fault. "Before that you were head-and-shoulders the best team I had, even as new as Connor was. What *happened?*"

Connor's gaze flicked away, listening to the rapid thud of his overstressed thirium pump. The world dipped again and he clenched his jaw against it, suppressing a shudder, and forced himself to listen to Fowler.

"*Nothing* happened," Hank snapped back, despite the fact that he knew Connor was hiding something, despite the fact that he surely knew as well as Connor that those had been Connor's mistakes and not his. "Sometimes things go wrong, you know that damn well. What makes this team different?"

"You know damn well what makes this team different," Fowler snapped back. "I want this to succeed as much as you do, but *goddammit, Hank-*"

Connor listened, or he tried to listen. It was getting harder, with a roar in his ears and his heart pounding faster and lighter, his regulator whirring and overheated and *painful*. He bumped up his respiration rate, struggling to manage it, and forced his hands to clench into fists. His whole body felt heavy enough to sink through the floor. He wanted to sit down.

"-Connor!"

Connor blinked, lifting his gaze back to Fowler's; he hadn't even realized it had dropped in the first place. Fowler was frowning at him, leaning over his desk with his palms flat against it.

He realized that his field of vision had narrowed. All he could see was Fowler, and some of the immediately surrounding area. Everything else was faded, electric blue static eating away at the edges. His thirium pump throbbed, and the pain flickered through his whole body, leaving a lingering renewed ache that took his breath away. Someone grabbed his arm and shook it.

Fowler left his desk, circling around. His expression had changed, frown gone, but Connor didn't have the attention span to reassess it.

[CRITICAL POWER FAILURE]

Connor passed out.

A slap woke him up, and he hissed and turned his head, expression pinching. A haze of blue warnings met him, and he brushed them aside without looking, dazed and dizzy. He could hear indistinct voices above him, quickly coming into clarity.

He blinked his eyes open and met Hank's above him, the man's expression twisted with anger and poorly hidden panic. Even without clear audio, Connor could recognize his name easily in the shape of the man's mouth.

Then, suddenly, everything snapped into place again, and he stiffened, eyes going wide. He twisted to look for Fowler, but his concerns were answered when he felt strong hands hauling him up and dumping him into a chair. When he looked, Fowler was frowning again, deep and intent.

"I'm sorry," he blurted out, panicked. He'd passed out in Fowler's office. He'd *passed out* in *Fowler's office*, in the middle of a dressing down. "I'm sorry, I didn't, I don't—"

Fowler was ignoring him.

"Didn't you check on him before you came in, Hank?" Fowler was demanding of Hank, as if this was Hank's fault and not Connor's. "I thought you, of all people—"

"He said he was fine!" Hank snarled, visibly frazzled. "Connor, what the *fuck*?"

"I'm fine," Connor insisted blindly, numbly, wide-eyed. The frantic rabbit-beat of his heart was starting to make him sick and breathless, and oh *god*, his chest hurt, like there was something in there wound tight enough to snap. His regulator felt like it might be actively sparking. "There's no- no need to—"

He tried to take a deep breath, listing against the arm of the chair, but he couldn't. At some point his hand had plastered against his chest again, and he couldn't bring himself to take it away.

"Shut up, you lying asshole," Hank hissed with real rage. "You—" Pause, and then, with dawning horror, "You're bleeding through your *goddamned shirt*."

Connor dropped his hand to his regulator, and found the cloth slick and wet. He took his hand away, and it was smeared with blue.

He stared at it uncomprehendingly. Belatedly, he realized that his LED had never faded from its blinding, vivid red.

"Can you call a fucking technician through 911 yet?" Hank demanded of Fowler. He leaned down and ripped Connor's shirt open, exposing the bleeding regulator to the open air, and Connor twitched painfully, a weak attempt to flinch away.

"Why the fuck would I know that before you do?" Fowler countered, on the opposite side of Connor from Hank.

"You can't," Connor said helpfully. Another flickering cascade of warning messages passed in front of his vision, and he shuddered, staring into the middle distance as he took them in.

[Critical damage to biocomponent #8456w – seek repairs from a Cyberlife facility immediately]

[Connection to biocomponent #0084b compromised]

[Data corruption: critical]

[Countdown timer: 16:03]

Connor twitched, breath – already shallow – briefly stuttering. He thought for a moment, nonsensically, of falling from a great height, and the ringing silence between the memory download and his reactivation.

“Oh,” Connor said quietly, shock crashing over him like a cold wave. “I’m dying.”

There was a brief hush in the office as both human men absorbed his words. Then Hank swore loudly.

“I’m calling Markus,” he snapped out, phone already in his hand. “How long?”

“Sixteen minutes,” Connor said, and the shock left as sudden terror crashed in. It was August. He wouldn’t even be a year old until next week. He was dying. “Hank-”

Hank didn’t answer, but his hand landed, firm and warm, on the crook of Connor’s arm as he spoke quickly into the phone. Then he passed it off to Fowler, who took it without hesitation, and turned to Connor.

“Anything we can do to slow it down?” he asked, deadly serious and focused.

“I’m sorry,” Connor blurted out, eyes wide. “Hank, I’m sorry, I didn’t- mean to-” It wasn’t meant to *happen like this-*

“Connor!” Hank snapped, volume rising in his panic.

Connor swallowed. “Thirium,” he said, voice small.

Hank nodded, and then hauled Connor up, arm over his shoulders, and almost dragged his stumbling form out of the office and into the suddenly silent bullpen.

“I need some thirium over here!” he called out, tone harsh with command. Immediately, both Chris and Ben were up, Ben hurrying over to help and Chris darting off.

“We don’t know what’s wrong with him,” Fowler was saying behind them, following them out. “He’s not responding much, don’t think he’s thinking clearly. Fuck, I’ll ask.” His voice rose a little. “Connor! What is it?”

Connor didn’t answer, disoriented and confused, eyes on Ben as he slipped in on Connor’s other side to help bring him the rest of the way until he was sitting at his own desk, and he couldn’t work like this, not now.

“Connor!” Hank snapped after a moment. Connor winced away, blinking slowly. His eyes wouldn’t focus, he couldn’t *see*. “Diagnostic!”

Numbly, Connor rattled off an error code and some stats, the words coming automatically to his system at the command. His head lolled a little, and he didn’t want to look at anyone.

He’d fucked this up so *bad*.

He heard Fowler relay the information into the phone, and a short minute (or maybe a long one) passed. Then he turned to Hank and said, “He’s having a heart attack.”

Hank swore, loudly and directly in Connor’s ear. Beside him, Ben had gone dead still.

“Markus wants to talk to you,” Fowler continued, terse and unhappy.

“Fuck off!” Hank snapped, but then he turned to Connor, eyes intense. “We’re talking about this. And you had fucking better be there for it, Connor!”

Then he was gone, taking his phone back from Fowler and putting it to his ear.

“What he’s trying to say is,” Ben said, voice heavy with exasperation, “you’re gonna be fine, kid.” When Connor looked up at him, his expression was pinched with worry, but when he saw Connor looking he smiled. “You’re too young to die from a heart attack.”

Connor blinked at him, too frightened to find the humor in it just now - the pain in his chest was *blinding*, his heart in his throat and he could taste his own thirium in the air. His hand was fisted over his chest, shaking.

“Hey, Connor, look at me,” Chris said, suddenly in front of him, and Connor looked up but didn’t meet his eyes. Chris looked focused, and faintly worried, brow furrowed. He pressed a bottle of thirium into Connor’s hand. “You’re gonna be fine, alright? Sounds like Markus is sending someone. Drink your blue blood.”

Connor nodded slowly, accepting the bottle and tipping it back so he wouldn’t have to find words to respond with.

His hands were shaking so bad that some of it spilled. He didn’t want this.

The thirium bought him three minutes and twenty seconds, which brought him back up to slightly above eighteen. He murmured this out, and someone must have told Hank because Hank swore loudly.

“We gotta get him out to the lobby,” Ben said, far away. “This is gonna cut it close-”

“I fucking *know* that, thanks for nothing-”

[CRITICAL POWER FAILURE]

For the first time in months, Connor woke up without a cascade of warnings greeting him. It was still slow and stuttered and laggy, and it took him several minutes to realize he was lying on a bed, under covers, and a few more to realize where he was.

But of course, he'd never been in New Jericho's care facility before. Self-recrimination, hot and shameful, ballooned in his chest, and he shut his eyes again.

He could hear the murmur of android-standard voices outside, business as usual. And he was hooked up to something, which, he assessed slowly, was running his regulator at a decreased rate of efficiency.

And someone was beside him.

Blearily, Connor opened his eyes again and found Hank flicking through his phone, visibly exhausted.

He lifted his hand and patted his stomach, finding a few wires and a thick tube. There was actually a hole where his regulator ought to be, he realized, and the implements were running into that. He could feel the faint rush of liquid in the tube - thirium, most likely.

"Hank?" he rasped. It came out hoarse and staticky, and he twitched, reminded unpleasantly of the incident that had started all this in the first place.

Hank started, dropping his phone on the ground with a loud clatter. For a split second, open relief flashed across his face as he met Connor's eyes, but then it dissolved into an expression that was eerily blank. Connor shifted uncomfortably, and then made as if to push himself up, though his arms did not seem to want to cooperate.

"Stay down!" Hank snapped, loud and unexpected.

His tone made Connor flinch, startled, and he dropped back down with a wince. Hank stared at him in cold silence for a few more moments, studious and stern and otherwise indecipherable.

"You're damn lucky Markus had the foresight to bring along that funky life support gear," Hank said at last, voice rasping not quite as badly as Connor's had moments before. There was an unmistakable undertone of anger to his voice, and Connor kept himself still as if that would prevent Hank from getting angrier. "He said there wouldn't've been enough time to hook you up to it after they'd gotten you back here."

Connor considered his options cautiously, eying Hank, and after a moment, analyzed them.

[Repentant/Defensive/Calm/Silent]

Each one unraveled into a more explicit set of dialogue options, and Connor found himself hesitant to pick any of them, leaving a conspicuously long silence before he spoke under Hank's glower. One of his hands clenched in the bedsheets – a courtesy, an unnecessary comfort in New Jericho's facilities.

"I'm grateful that Markus is such a resourceful man, then," he said eventually, keeping his voice low and carefully measured, his gaze skittering away from Hank's. "The damage worsened much more quickly than I'd anticipated."

The echo of the day's fear was still tight and heavy in his chest, and mortification and guilt coated it like a thick and sticky thing. He'd handled this so badly.

"The damage worsened much more quickly than I'd anticipated," Hank echoed mockingly, and Connor's gaze shot back to his, sharp and startled. "Do you take me for a goddamn fool, Connor? You've been off for *months*, even Markus said so – is this what you've been hiding? You thought you'd just lay down and fucking *die* to sate your dumbass guilt complex, is that it?"

"Don't talk about me like I'm irrational," Connor snapped defensively, before he could think twice. The sheets pooled in his lap as he pushed himself up with energy he didn't have, hissing as dizziness momentarily overtook him, but when it passed he met Hank's gaze again with cold frustration. "It wasn't anything like that, I was planning on seeking help eventually."

"You *are* irrational!" Hank retaliated, voice rising. "Were you planning on telling me before or *after* you bit it? 'Cause it's sure looking like after to me!"

"It wasn't necessary," Connor argued. His chest hurt; being upright was not helping his current condition, but he refused to take this literally *laying down*, feeling beleaguered and accused. A false static overlaid his vision and tingled at his fingertips, but his attention was focused on Hank.

One of the machines started to whine pathetically, quiet enough to be overlooked, and the blue numbers on the screen turned yellow to match Connor's spinning LED.

"What the fuck are you going on about?" Hank demanded, volume rising with each word. "Does it even fucking matter to you? Jesus Christ, Connor, I've done my damn best to wrap my mind around how your weird brain works, but sometimes it's like I'm knocking and no one's home! And now *this*?"

[Replay: Are you afraid to die, Connor?]

"I thought you preferred it when I didn't keep you apprised of the technical workings involved in my form," Connor bit out, hands shaking not from disruptions but from the sheer force of emotion. His thirium pump was racing again, beating a rapid and uncomfortable tattoo against the inside of his chassis. His rasp became more pronounced with the increase in volume, making him sound shaky and weak but not quite hiding the chill of his tone. "I'll be sure to update your file to suit the change of heart."

"Oh, so now you're onto *that* bullshit again?" Hank bitched at him, fiery and unsympathetic. "News flash, Connor, talking like a machine ain't gonna make you into one again! You still gotta deal with the same shit all the rest of us do!"

Frustration seared through Connor, making him feel at once wild and fragile. Everything had come crashing down around him. Instead of flying under the radar, as he'd desired, he'd made a scene in the middle of the precinct, presumably lost the job he was trying so desperately to hold onto, thoroughly made himself out to be burdensome and neurotic and ineffective, come gut-wrenchingly close to the aching void that rang between destruction and reactivation, and Hank *wouldn't stop yelling*.

He opened his mouth to reply, searching desperately for words, but at that moment the machine's whine went from soft to screeching, and the door opened, almost banging against the wall in the entrant's haste.

It was Markus, as if this day couldn't get any more absolutely mortifying as it was. His eyes, tight with something too close to panic, went right to Connor's LED, which Connor only now realized had turned red.

Then Markus turned an almost wrathful look on Hank, who'd turned at the sound of the door, scowling harshly.

"Unless you're *trying* to upset Connor more than he already is," he said with deceptive, icy softness, "I suggest you *calm down*, Lieutenant. You're hurting him."

He nodded to the display, and a furtive glance revealed that it showed a display of homeostatic data, pulse and stress levels and humidity. Both the pulse and stress levels were lit up red; his stress reading was in the mid-seventies, and Connor could acutely feel every point of that.

Hank looked, too, and half the fight went out of him almost instantly. He exhaled in a shudder, reaching up to run his fingers through his hair, and then bending down to pick up his phone and shove it in his pocket.

Connor watched him, meeting his eyes without trouble, his own brown ones wide with something like hysteria. Markus' were soft - sad, worried, but not. Angry.

Connor couldn't bring himself to release his tightly clenched fists, head tilted up to look at Markus. It was hurting more by the moment to stay up, the wires pulling and protesting and the humidity of his system evidently not cleared out, so the sparks of pain in his chest and jaw kept twinging angrily.

"I'm not a child," Connor rasped at last, clinging to steadiness by his fingertips. "I'm not hysterical, or overemotional, or *irrational*."

Despite the sudden withdrawal of hostility, Connor found that his stress levels were refusing to fall, teetering as if on the brink of something.

Hank exhaled again, heavy and burdened.

"Yeah," he said after a moment. "Yeah, I know. You just make stupid choices sometimes. Everyone does. God knows I do." Another breath, shuddering. "But fuck. Fuck, kid. You can't do this to me."

"Lay back down, Connor," Markus added when Connor didn't respond, still staring vacantly. His voice was still kind, if firm. "I can see you're still hurting. I promise no one is going to yell at you."

Connor hesitated, for some reason reluctant, but Markus placed a gentle hand on his shoulder and pushed, and, slowly, he let himself down. With the motion, and the accompanying ease of much of the electric discomfort in his body, his stress levels finally dropped – ten, twenty, thirty points, into the forties.

At the same time, his breath hitched, and saline tears welled up without his permission. He turned his head away, too tired to put up a proper pretense but frustrated with his own vulnerability. He was too tired for the sound to come out loud, but his breath caught and whined without his permission.

Markus' hand moved from his shoulder to curl around the back of his neck, while Hank's appeared at his shoulder, steady and, Connor had to admit, comforting, even after their most recent argument.

"I'm sorry," Connor whispered, at a loss for anything else to say. "I'm *sorry*."

Markus shushed him, and there was no hiding the exhausted worry in his tone, heavy and thick.

"You didn't have to do this, kid," Hank said after a while, when Connor's exhausted tears had only just started to slow. "Fuck, you could've been fixed months ago. Markus told me all the shit that would've been happening with your regulator thing in that state – you didn't have to put up with that."

Connor reached up and wiped his tears away without looking up, and paused for a few moments before answering, hoarse and almost apathetic with misery and the fatigue of months.

"I got the original damage before I was a deviant," he confessed, not looking at either of them. "You remember, Hank. I *killed* the deviant that did it." Neither of them replied right away, and Connor swallowed convulsively. "I didn't deserve to get a new part. Not from New Jericho."

"*Hell*, Connor," Hank blurted out, and Connor flinched, shutting his eyes. "That long ago? All this time?"

"Hank," Markus said sharply, and Hank subsided. When he spoke again, his voice was gentle. "Connor, you're not at fault for the things you did before you were deviant. You didn't know how to say no. You *certainly* don't need to pay for it with your life."

"That wasn't my intention," Connor insisted weakly, hand falling to his regulator and the tube protruding from it again.

"Heart problems aren't to be trifled with," Markus said, heavy, and Connor remembered that it had been a heart attack that killed Carl Manfred. "I have people looking - we should be able

to find you a new regulator within a couple days.” He hesitated, and then continued, “I... wish you had asked for help, Connor.”

“I’m sorry,” Connor said, misery leaking into his voice uninvited. “It... got out of hand.” He glanced at Hank, tentative and anxious. “Was Captain Fowler very angry?”

Markus looked over, gaze openly warning, but Hank didn’t even look, staring at Connor. After a moment, he rolled his eyes. Connor scowled at him.

“He told me,” Hank said, with exaggerated patience, “to let him know when we had a prognosis, and what the recovery time was supposed to be. Said he expected you back at work *after* you had all your pieces together, and not a day before.” Pause, and then, meaningfully, “Ben and Chris both offered to visit, but you shouldn’t be here that long anyway. They just might have anyway, if it were any easier to get a human in here.”

Connor blinked, startled, and almost sat up again before Hank pushed him back down.

“But I-” Connor started to protest, confused and a little overwhelmed, “I failed badly, I refused to reveal vital operation information that directly contributed to multiple significant mistakes in various cases, I expected-” He’d assumed-

“We’re not your fucking enemies, Connor,” Hank said, a little less patient now. “And you’re not a goddamn tool. This isn’t Cyberlife and the revolution wasn’t for *everyone but you*, Jesus, Connor. Pull your head out of your ass and pretend to have a sense of self-preservation every once in a while.”

That stung, but the steel in Hank’s eyes was different from the venom of earlier. Better, maybe.

“I’ll see about finding someone I can learn that trait from,” Connor returned, with a tentative smile, and Hank snorted.

Markus laughed a little too, shaky with relief, and Connor looked at him.

His eyes were soft.

“I have to agree,” Markus said quietly, his hand still on the back of Connor’s neck. “Please don’t do this again, Connor. I don’t think *my* heart could take it.”

“...Okay,” Connor promised, eyes fixed on him. “I’ll try not to. I promise.”

Markus smiled, and then let go, reaching down to pull the sheets back up and over the small tangle of wires and cords. “Go to sleep, Connor. You’re still nowhere near a hundred percent, and you look exhausted.”

Connor hummed, realizing that Markus was right, and his eyes were already drifting closed. “Alright...”

He drifted slowly, listening to the sound of voices over him, quiet but brisk.

“You said a couple days, right? You know I’m not gonna leave.”

“I’ll keep you updated, Lieutenant, but I’m limited in what I can do.”

“Like hell you are.”

“Lieutenant”

Connor’s LED finally circled blue, and he fell asleep; it felt like peace instead of defeat.

Chapter End Notes

Hank reacts badly to worry. Worry about Connor, especially.

Thank you all for reading, and please leave a comment!

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